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To the Editor:

The flip side of those green “High Tax Zone” signs you see around reads “High quality service and schools zone.”

That is what Montgomery County residents would lose if Robin Ficker’s Charter Amendment A passes.

Currently, Montgomery County cannot receive more in tax revenue than it received the previous year, increased only by the consumer price index amount, unless seven Councilmembers vote to override that limitation. Ficker’s amendment would limit our ability to approve a budget that exceeds that limit, which we have done only three times in the past 14 years.

We are committed to finding ways to reduce County spending. We’ve embraced innovative solutions to contain employee health care benefits such as our work on Canadian prescription drugs and county-wide prescription cards. That’s important because employee compensation and benefits constitute 80 percent of our budget.

The Management and Fiscal Policy arm of the Council continues its determination to find cross cutting solutions to reduce the costs of government. Watch us at budget time. The knife is sharp, and the cuts have gone deep.

The less popular “carry in, carry-out” trash initiative in the parks was initiated to decrease the high cost of trash management. Our renewed efforts in recycling are not just designed to help the environment; they are calculated to avoid huge trash disposal infrastructure costs in the future. If you think these cost-cutting measures were unwelcome, then watch out for Question A. If it passes, we won’t be taking the knife to County services, we will have to pick up the chain saw.

The truth is that our current cost-cutting must be balanced against long-ignored transportation needs, public safety equipment maintenance, and rising problems with pedestrian safety. It must take into account neighborhood clamor for tree management and sidewalks, the service needs of our burgeoning immigrant community, and the ever-growing demands on our educational system from pre-school to the community college level.

If our hands are tied, as Ficker’s Amendment A would mandate, we will have no option but to slash, not improve, service in response to increased demands in the future. Only residents who truly believe that our current levels of educational, public safety, or family assistance should never be increased nor should new

initiatives ever be added, could justify voting for this Amendment. Based on our experience, we know they would be wrong.

Sincerely,

Nancy Floreen & Marilyn Praisner  
Montgomery County Council

Councilmember Floreen chairs the Transportation & Environment Committee.  
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